

Watch - gift from A.L. to Rev. James Kekele

Drawer 24

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Curios and Relics

Clothing Accessories

Watch

Gift from Abraham Lincoln to
Rev. James Kekela

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Published by
The Board of the
Hawaiian Evangelical
Association

Mission Memorial
Building

P. O. Box 150



The FRIEND

Established 1843
the oldest newspaper west
of the Rocky Mountains

LINCOLN LIFE

Referred to Dr. Warren
OCT 10 1938

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HORACE H. LEAVITT

Managing Editor

EMILY V. WARINNER

Correspondents

REV. W. E. ROWAN, Maui

MR. W. C. MOORE, Kauai

REV. T. D. PRESTON, Hawaii

REV. T. M. TALMAGE, Oahu

HONOLULU, HAWAII

September 29, 1928

Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.,
Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Attention Mr. Arthur S. Hall, President

Gentlemen;

As your organization bears the illustrious name of Lincoln you may be interested to purchase a very interesting Lincoln relic in my possession.

The piece to which I refer is the engraved watch given by President Lincoln to the Rev. James Kekela in the year 1864 in recognition of Mr. Kekela's bravery in saving the life of an American seaman. The incident occurred at Hivaoa, Marquesas Islands (then cannibalistic) and called for prompt and heroic action on the part of Mr. Kekela as the seaman had been seized and marked for death.

The story has been immortalized by Robert Louis Stevenson in his volume "In the South Seas". All of the facts are in my possession. Mr. Kekela's letter of thanks to President Lincoln, written in Hawaiian, is with the Lincoln collection in the Library of Congress.

The watch, long coveted by many people, was given to me by Mr. Kekela's son after I was successful a few years ago in raising funds for a Kekela Memorial in Honolulu. The first Mr. Kekela was the first ordained Hawaiian minister and had a distinguished career of half a century in the Marquesas Islands.

As the only piece of its kind in existence I believe this watch - a gold stem winder in perfect condition with presentation engraving on the inside of the case - to be worth \$5,000. I would, however, entertain an offer.

If your company is interested to own this authentic relic please communicate with me at once. Not being sure of the distinction I am writing also to the Lincoln National Life Foundation. To date I have not communicated with any other organization as I have just decided to sell the watch.

Very truly yours,

Emily V. Warinner
Emily V. Warinner,

811 Lunalilo Street,
Honolulu, Hawaii

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Dr. Louis A Warren,
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The piece to which I refer is the engraved watch given by President Lincoln to the Rev. James Kekela in the year 1864 in recognition of Mr. Kekela's bravery in saving the life of an American seaman. The incident occurred at Hivaoa, Marquesas Islands (then cannibalistic) and called for prompt and heroic action on the part of Mr. Kekela as the seaman had been seized and marked for death.

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811 Lunalilo St., Honolulu

Watch

October 11, 1938

Edily V. Warinner
811 Lunalilo Street
Honolulu, Hawaii

Dear Madam:

The Lincoln National Life Foundation is sponsored by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company so I have on my desk both your letter to Mr. Hall, President of the Company, and your letter to me as Director of the Foundation.

The Lincoln watch which you mention, while a very interesting curio, indeed, does not come in our line, as we give very little attention to curios. We are interested, however, in manuscripts and information which gives us a better insight into the life and character of Abraham Lincoln.

Thank you for calling to our attention the interesting curio.

Very truly yours,

LAW: EB

Director

The White House, 1864

Lincoln Gave Gold Watch to Native Missionary Who Saved Sailor's Life

By LIAL BOYLE

NEW YORK, Feb. 12. (AP)—Did you ever hear how Abraham Lincoln gave a gold watch to a native missionary for saving an American seaman from being eaten by South Sea cannibals?

He took time out from his Civil War duties 74 years ago last month to do this small act of kindness. This little-known story is better

remembered in Honolulu than in Washington. Wilmon Menard tells it in the current issue of "Natural History," magazine of the American Museum of Natural History.

The scene was the island of Hiva-Oa in the Marquesas group below the Pacific equator. A Peruvian crew shelled this green paradise, landed, ravished the women and seized many native men for labor in the mines of Peru.

Wolf Bait

The cannibal tribes swore to get revenge by putting on their bill of fare the next white sailors to land.

Later an American whaler hove to offshore. Hearing of the remarkable beauty of the Polynesian girls, First Mate Jonathan Whalon rowed in.

The merry cannibals locked their arms in his, told him the prize beauties lived further up the valley—away from the island's mission station.

Whalon—neither the first nor the last American wolf to fall for this bait—went along cheerfully. As soon as they were out of sight, the cannibals trussed him up and threw him before a stone altar.

As the faggots were piled, word was spread around that the menu for the day would be good old

"puaka enata," which can only be translated as "long-pig."

Some vegetarians on the island, however, ran to the native missionary, James Kekela, and snitched:

"A white man is about to be roasted."

Dressed in Sunday Best

The Rev. Alexander Kaukau, Hawaiian associate of Kekela, meanwhile had got in touch with Mato, the cannibal chieftain, but failed to dissuade him from his program for solving the tourist problem.

Mato, whose son had been shanghaied by Spanish sailors, insisted:

"They are all one kind—the white men. I shall roast this white man."

Heedless of personal peril, Kekela dressed up in his Sunday best. Carrying only a Bible, he and the Rev. Mr. Kaukau went to the cannibals' outdoor kitchen. They arrived just in time. Under the angry gaze of the natives, Kekela boldly strode up to the terrified sailor, knelt, and prayed over him.

Chief Mato was overawed by Kekela's Sabbath finery. But he refused to call off the barbecue until the missionary offered to give him his own boat and another friend promised him a gun.

Lincoln Sends \$500

Thus was spared Jonathan Whalon, the man who came for romance and almost stayed for dinner. When

his ship returned to America, the story of his novel rescue reached President Lincoln.

Lincoln promptly sent \$500 to the U. S. Minister in Honolulu to buy gold watches for both Kekela and the Rev. Mr. Kaukau.

In a simple and eloquent letter of gratitude, Kekela wrote:

"Ah! I greatly honor your interest in this countryman of yours. It is, indeed, in keeping with all I have known of your acts as President of the United States."

Robert Louis Stevenson, who loved the natives and thought the white man's civilization a curse to them, once saw Kekela's letter and said:

"I do not envy the man who can read it without emotion."

In time the gold watch became battered as the proud Kekela beat it against his pulpit, exhorting his people to give up eating the "puaka enata" forever.

Property of Society

The watch now belongs to the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society in Honolulu. Inside the case is this inscription in Hawaiian:

"From the President of the United States to Rev. J. Kekela for his noble conduct in rescuing an American citizen from death on the island of Hiva-Oa, January 14, 1864."

TELLS OF LINCOLN GIFT OF WATCH TO BRAVE MISSIONARY

(By Hal Boyle)

New York—(P)—Did you ever hear how Abraham Lincoln gave a gold watch to a native missionary for saving an American seaman from being eaten by South sea cannibals?

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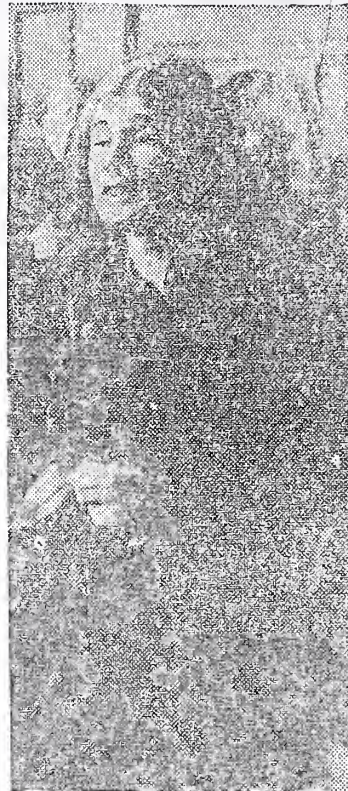
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Heedless of personal peril, Kekela dressed up in his Sunday best. Carrying only a bible, he and the Rev. Kaukau went to the cannibal's outdoor kitchen. They



U. S. CITIZEN, Elizabeth Pallos, declares she is not guilty before the Hungarian people's court in Budapest, where she and several American newsmen are charged with plotting to overthrow the present Hungarian government. Pittsburgh-born Miss Pallos has been secretary of Jack Guinn, U. S. correspondent, who with other newsmen charged with the plot has been expelled from Hungary. (International)

arrived just in time. Under the anery gaze of the natives, Kekela boldly strode up to the terrified sailor, knelt, and prayed over him.

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"From the president of the United States to Rev. J. Kekela for his noble conduct in rescuing an American citizen from death on the island of Hiva-Oa, January 14, 1864."

Date

see: Natural History

Feb 1948

64-65 pp

Lincoln Gave Watch to Cleric For Saving City Whaleman's Life



Modern Marquesan sits by altar where Jonathan Whalon, mate of the New Bedford whaler Congress, was due to be sacrificed and eaten. Bowl was used in gruesome sacrificial and cannibal rites.

—Photos from Wilmon Menard



(Anecdotes about President Abraham Lincoln are innumerable, but Wilmon Menard of Honolulu, Hawaii, has uncovered the never-before-told story of the President's gift of a gold watch to a Pacific missionary who saved the mate of a New Bedford whaler from death at the hands of an angry Marquesas chieftain. Here is the story, testimony to the fact the President of a land wracked by fratricidal war took time out to remember a brave and Christian man thousands of miles west of the battlefields of the Civil War.)

2-9-64

Standard Times
New Bedford, Mass

By WILMON MENARD

There is, among the Lincoln papers in the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., a rather remarkable letter, received by America's most honored President during the despairing days of the Civil War. It is safe to say that few have seen this letter, lost as it is among the volume of Lincoln lore. But if one did come across it an incredible tale would be unfolded of a heroic and dramatic act performed by a brave missionary in the remote Marquesas Islands of the South Pacific, and which Lincoln took time, during the grim exigencies of war, to generously reward.

Whaler Anchored

This is the story:

The American whaler Congress, under command of Captain C. Stranburg, sailed from New Bedford in June 1863 for a whaling cruise in the South Pacific, and on Jan. 13, 1864, arrived in the Bay of Puamau on the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas group to provision, water and make necessary overhauls to hull and rigging.

The mate of the whaler, Jonathan Whalon, although the captain warned him that the natives were cannibals, decided to go ashore in a longboat and trade with the Marquesans.

A band of seemingly friendly villagers on the beach enticed Whalon up a valley on a simulated pig-hunt, where he was overpowered, thrown to the ground and stripped naked. His clothes and buttons were distributed among his captors.

Then the cannibals started systematic torturing rites, pinching him, bending his fingers and thumbs over the back of his hands, wrenching his nose and torturing him in every conceivable manner.

Whalon had fallen into the hands of a Marquesan clan crazed with hatred against white men, because of a Peruvian

slave ship that had sailed earlier into Puamau Bay, firing upon the defenseless villages, and kidnaping men and women to work in the mines of Peru. The high chief's son was seized and died with the others in the guano diggings on Peru's Chincha Islands.

Missionary Came

At this time, the Rev. James Kekela, a Hawaiian Protestant missionary, had his mission-station on Puamau Bay. He had come in 1850 to the Marquesas to try and convince the Marquesans to change their diet from "puaka enaka" (human beings), to the wild pigs of the valleys.

Advised that an "American seaman is about to be roasted," he dressed himself in his Sunday preaching-clothes and rushed up the valley.

There he addressed the fierce cannibal chief in a stern voice: "Now, look here, Mato, this is a very wicked thing you are about to do. I am here to ask you to deliver the white man unharmed to me."

"All white men are alike!" shouted Mato. "They took my son, and he will never come back, nor few of my abducted people!"

"I still demand the white man from you!" replied Kekela.

The cannibal chief raised his ironwood skull-crusher, took a step toward Kekela, but the missionary did not move.

"I could roast you, too, Kekela, if I wanted!"

But Kekela did not flinch. Ma-

to was astonished at the rashness and courage of this missionary who entered the chief's territory to demand the life of a white whaleman.

And finally, accepting many personal possessions from Kekela, he released the terrified mate. On Jan. 16, 1864, Kekela delivered Whalon to Captain Stranburg.

Gifts Sent

When the Congress arrived in the United States, the brave role played by James Kekela was reported to President Lincoln, who was so moved by Kekela's heroism that he ordered suitable gifts in the amount of \$500 be sent to Kekela; among the presents was a fine gold hunting-case watch, with an appropriate inscription in the inside cover. This watch can be seen today in the museum of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society in Honolulu.

Missionary James Kekela wrote in Hawaiian a letter of thanks to President Lincoln: "Greetings to you, great and good friend: We have received your gifts of friendship . . . it is, indeed, in keeping with all I have known of your acts as President of the United States . . . And so may the love of the Lord Jesus abound with you until the end of this terrible war in your land . . ."

Many changes have come to the Marquesas islands since the days of the whaleships and the Rev. James Kekela. But, for those who would otherwise forget what the Marquesas were like less than a century ago, James Kekela's bronze memorial tablet, at the side of the driveway of the Kawaiahao Church in Honolulu, bears, in part, this inscription as a reminder: "In 1864 he was signally rewarded by Abraham Lincoln for rescuing an American seaman from cannibals.

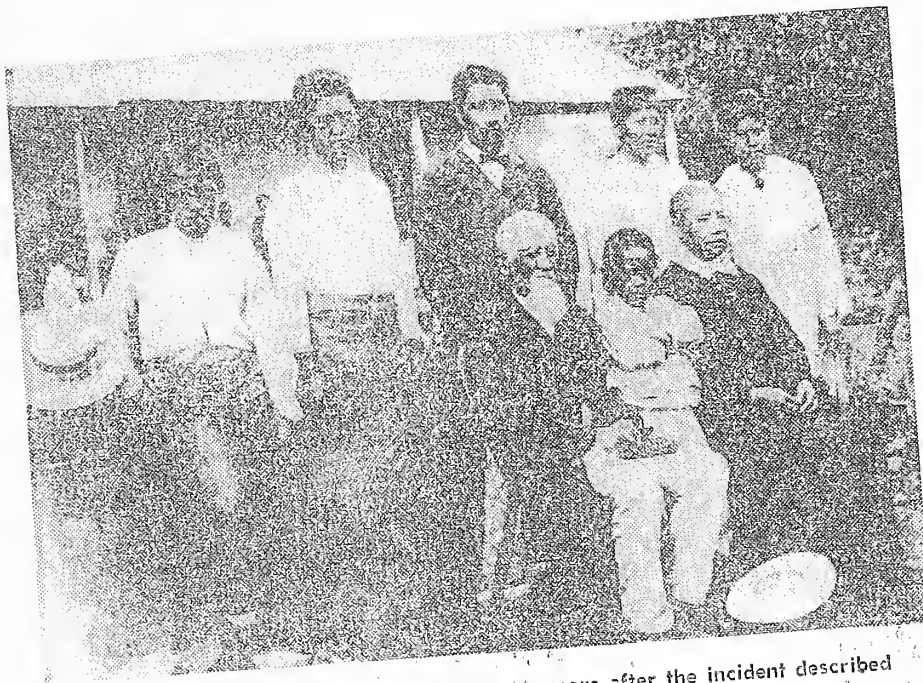
Philosophy Simple

And at the bottom of the plaque, in Hawaiian, is James Kekela's simple philosophy that enabled him, during his 46 years

in the Marquesas, to win over the cannibal tribes.

"O Ke Aloha, oia ka molo o na mea pono ame na me oiaio a pau."

"Love is the root of all that is good and true."



This photo of Mr. Kekela was taken many years after the incident described in the accompanying story. White-bearded patriarch sits with his wife surrounded by his sons, daughters and grandson.



Grandson of the heroic missionary is the Rev. James S. Kekela, assistant pastor of a Honolulu church. He stands beside the memorial tablet honoring his grandfather's courageous deed beside the driveway of Kawaiahao Church in downtown Honolulu.



Watch President Lincoln gave heroic missionary, the Rev. James Kekela, for saving the life of a New Bedford whaler, is shown above and at upper right. Swiss-made watch is key-wind and was made circa 1850; it is now the property of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society of Honolulu. Note inscription in Hawaiian engraved within cover of watch.



Deceptively beautiful is the Bay of Puamau on the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas Islands of the far Pacific where a whaler's mate nearly lost his life at the hands of angry cannibals.

From President Lincoln to Rev. J. Kekela

HONOLULU, HAWAII

SUNDAY STAR-BULLETIN &
ADVERTISER
FEBRUARY 12TH, 1978

By Lois Taylor, Star-Bulletin Writer

Locked away in a vault because it has been stolen once, and unavailable for exhibit except to descendants of the Rev. James Hunnewell Kekela, is a gold watch. On the inside of the case is an inscription in Hawaiian.

Translated, it reads, "From the President of the United States to Rev. J. Kekela for his noble conduct in rescuing an American citizen from death on the island of Hiva Oa, January 14, 1864."

The president was Abraham Lincoln and the sure fate from which the American citizen was saved was that of being roasted alive and then eaten by Marquesan cannibals.

The watch is now the property of the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society, acquired by them many years ago from one of Kekela's family. This account of Kekela's "noble conduct" is gathered from the society's files.

James Kekela was born in Moku-leia, and given an annual \$50 scholarship to Lahainaluna School by James Hunnewell, a founder of the firm that is now C. Brewer and Co. In gratitude, Kekela added Hunnewell's name to his own. Kekela was the first Hawaiian to be ordained as a Christian minister, and in 1853 he was sent by the Hawaiian Mission Society as a pioneer missionary to the Marquesas Islands.

THE CANNIBAL TRIBES of the port village of Puamau had nursed a hatred for the white sailors who occasionally landed in their area, founded when a Peruvian whaling ship died upon their shores.

their women and carried their young men off to work in the mines of Peru.

The men of the village took a blood oath to eat the next white sailor to come ashore.

Into this background wandered Jonathan Whalon, the first mate of an American whaler, Congress, having heard of the beauty of the girls of Puamau.

Whalon was promised a girl if he would follow the men of the village into the hills, away from Kekela's mission station. He went willingly, his arms locked in those of the cannibals.

Then they leaped upon him, tied him up and threw him to the ground at the foot of a stone altar. A fire was being prepared for the roasting, he later recalled.

In the meantime, Kekela was informed by his assistant, Rev. Alexander Kaukau (an apt name for a missionary to the cannibals) that an American sailor was about to be sacrificed. Kaukau had tried to persuade the chief to free Whalon, but Mato's son had been kidnapped by Spanish sailors and he was bent on revenge.

KEKELA SENT AN emissary to Mato, offering his boat in exchange for the life of the sailor. Then he dressed himself in his Sunday clothes, carried his Bible, and hiked up the valley to confront M to.

Kekela's composure impressed the cannibals, and when a gun was offered as well as the boat, Mato accepted the trade. Kekela led the captured sailor back to the mission

and safety.

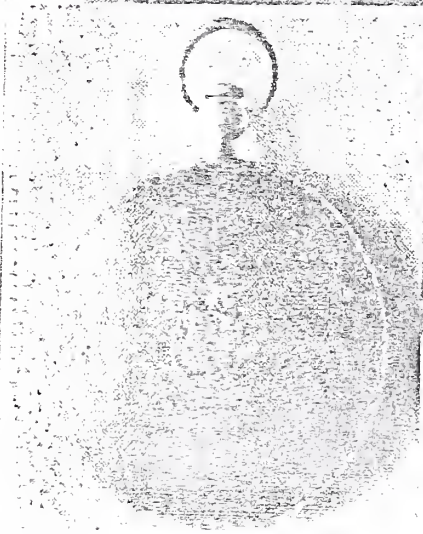
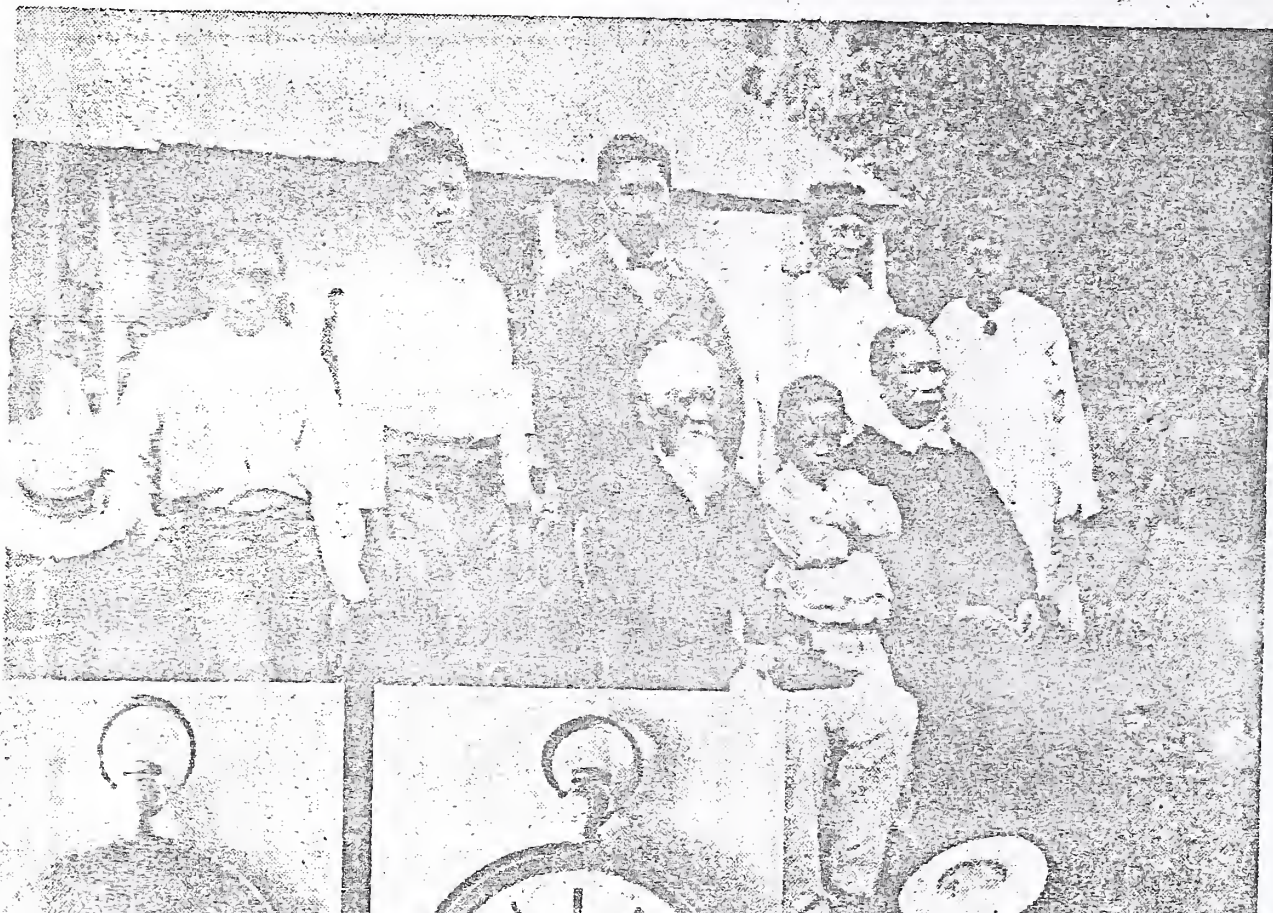
The account of Whalon's capture and rescue were recounted by his shipmates, and the incident eventually came to the attention of Abraham Lincoln. Although the Civil War was occupying most of his energy, the president found time in 1864 to send \$500 in gold to Dr. McBride, the U.S. Minister in Honolulu "for the purchase of suitable gifts."

McBride ordered a keywind watch of 13 jewels from Ferdinand Cartier of Switzerland. The watch was engraved in Hawaii with "Kekela" in a crest on the watch cover and with the inscription inside.

Kekela thanked the president for his gift in a letter to Lincoln written in Hawaiian. The letter has been preserved in the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C., and excerpts from it have been translated into English and engraved on a stone tablet at Kawaiahae Church.

"AS TO THIS FRIENDLY deed of mine in saving Mr. Whalon, Kekela wrote, "its seed came from your great land, and was brought by certain of your countrymen, who had received the love of God. It was planted in Hawaii, and I brought it to plant in this land and in these dark regions, that they might receive the root of all that is good and true, which is love."

But Lincoln never read the letter. He was struck by an assassin's bullet while his staff was trying to locate a translator to interpret



The Rev. James Munnewell Kekela and his wife, Naomi, with an unidentified child between them. Behind them stands James Samuel Kekela, extreme left, his brother Munnewell Kekela and Samuel, Kauwa and Kaula Kekela, son and daughters of the Rev. and his wife. The watch from Lincoln is shown in photos at left.

Untold History Behind Gold Watch



Written by Sunrise on KGMB9 - sunrise@kgmb9.com
July 30, 2009 08:40 AM



It's an interesting story of how this watch was gifted to Kahu Kekela by President Lincoln himself.

"Reverend Kekela was sent to the mission in the Marquesas and while he was there one day he heard very strongly that they needed his help because a young man was about to made a long pig and this is what the Marquesans on this particular island who were cannibalistic called their next dinner when it was human," said Elizabeth Nosek.

Kahu Kekela was able to trade and barter clothes and guns for this American sailor's life.

"It got back to someone in Abraham Lincoln's government and he was made aware of it and he approved to have some things given as thank you gifts to Reverend Kekela and the other people who were involved in this trade. And Reverend Kekela received a suit of clothes and a beautiful gold watch with an inscription in Hawaiian," Nosek said.

A gift of gratitude from the President of the United States of America to Kahu Kekela for saving an American life in Hivaoa.

"When he got the gift, he obviously wrote a thank you letter in which he talked about his family and his love of being a missionary. He sent that letter. Unfortunately Abraham Lincoln was assassinated before he was able to receive the letter," Nosek said.

This special gift stayed in the family as a bequest to Kahu's son but the son unfortunately sold it off.

"So what happened was a group of the descendants of missionaries heard this story and they purchased the watch for the Museum. And we have visitors from the family every so often who will come to see the watch," Nosek said.

A unique story from our beloved history of Hawaii.



Last Updated (August 01, 2009 08:49 AM)

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Lincoln and the 'Cannibals'

February 25, 2014, 9:00 pm
By JEFFREY ALLEN SMITH

Disunion follows the Civil War as it unfolded.

While America was embroiled in a bloody civil war for its very survival, a little over 5,000 miles away from Washington, in the middle of the South Pacific, the people of the Marquesas Islands were in a struggle of their own over slavery.

The American war, unsurprisingly, more detailed documentation. In the Marquesas conflict, differing witness testimony, secondhand accounts, various newspaper articles, translations and time all conspired to obscure details. Nevertheless, in sifting through the historical minutiae, a relatively clear picture emerged of an incredible series of events that ultimately came to the attention of President Abraham Lincoln in April 1864.

In 1856, slavery technically ended in Peru, but the need for workers to toil in slavelike conditions in the country's tin and guano mines did not. As a result, "blackbirding" ships roamed the Pacific ensnaring unfortunate souls "by hook or by crook" to labor in Peru. The victims were often the peoples of the South Pacific.

In 1863 a Peruvian blackbirding ship sailed into Puamau Bay on the northeastern shore of Hiva Oa Island in the Marquesas. After opening fire on people gathered onshore, the slavers made off with all the Puamau men and women they could grab, including the chief's son. Understandably distraught and angered by this atrocity, those who lived through the assault pledged to exact a frightful vengeance if foreign sailors dared show again.

Unfortunately, the crew members of the American whaling ship Congress from New Bedford, Mass., were the next foreign sailors to show. Capt. Francis E. Stranburg and his men were blissfully ignorant of the islanders' oath of revenge and the raid on Puamau Bay when they casually dropped anchor there Jan. 13, 1864. For to the captain and crew, this was routine, just another stop to make repairs and obtain provisions. The sailors lowered two longboats loaded with trade goods, and a small detachment of men led by the first officer, Jonathan Whalon, rowed toward the beach in Puamau Bay.

Probably intoxicated by tales of Polynesian hospitality and the "custom" of offering attractive young females to traders, Whalon interpreted the hand gestures, broken English and disposition of the islanders who paddled out to greet them as signs of a people eager to trade. Foolishly, Whalon went ashore alone with the Marquesans, ordering the crew of the two longboats to stay back and wait for his return.

However, once well inside the tree line, the Paumau men seized Whalon, stripped him of his clothes and bound him. They took him to their village, where tribal members reportedly pinched him, tweaked his nose, bent his fingers back over his hands, menacingly swung hatchets at him and eventually began building a fire with which to cook him.

Back in Puamau Bay, more islanders were actively trying to entice the waiting sailors in the two longboats to come ashore. The whalers almost complied, and would have but for the efforts of a Marquesan girl who ran out frantically shouting and waving her hands. The chaotic scene proved unnerving and unsettling to the sailors, so they returned to the Congress without Whalon.

By this time word had begun to spread on the island about the kidnapped American sailor. A Hawaiian missionary improbably named Alexander Kaukau (Kaukau is Hawaiian pidgin for "food" or "to eat") and Bartholomen Negal, a local German carpenter, tried and failed to dissuade Mato, the Paumau chief, from killing Whalon. According to some reports, Kaukau pleaded with Mato for Whalon's life but Mato replied, "The white men are wrong in kidnapping my son and carrying him to their land. I dearly love my son." Again Kaukau implored Mato claiming that Americans were "good people." Unpersuaded, Mato simply shot back, "They are all one kind, white men."

However, fate interceded with the arrival of another Hawaiian missionary, James Kekela, the first Hawaiian ordained as a Christian missionary and Kaukau's senior. He had fortuitously just returned from a neighboring island to reports of a "white man is about to be roasted." After gaining what information he could, Kekela donned his black preacher's jacket and, with only his bible in hand, set off for Mato's village. The negotiations were tense, and at one point Kekela declared he would trade "anything and everything he possessed" for the sailor's release.

But ultimately Kekela purchased Whalon's freedom with much less: his black preacher's jacket and prized whaleboat. In fact, some contend that the entire event was a ruse by Mato to get Kekela's boat, given its high value in the islands. Nevertheless, Kekela returned Whalon to the waiting Congress, which sailed to Honolulu, where tales of "cannibals" capturing an American sailor and Kekela's heroics prompted the American minister to Hawaii, James McBride, to write a note to Secretary of State William H. Seward.

McBride's letter, dated Feb. 26, 1864, detailed the harrowing events in the Marquesas and requested that Seward "show to the world ... we have tender regard for each one of our number, and that we highly, very highly, appreciate such favors."

Taking almost a month to make its way across the Pacific, the letter arrived on Seward's desk by April 18, 1864. Three days later Seward replied that he had submitted McBride's account of the rescue to Lincoln and that the president had "instructions" for the diplomat. McBride was directed to "draw on this department for five hundred dollars in gold" to purchase presents for Whalon's rescuers, and to engrave the gifts with the words: "From the President of the United States to — for his [or her] noble conduct in

rescuing an American citizen from death-Island of Hivaoa-1863." (McBride took it upon himself to correct the year to 1864.)

Roughly a year later, on Feb. 14, 1865, McBride sent word to Seward detailing the presents he distributed. He had sent gifts to the Hawaiian missionary Kaukau, the German carpenter Negal and even the young Marquesan girl who warned the sailors in the two long boats. He gave Kekela two new suits and a gold Cartier pocket watch with the inscription, "From the President of the United States to Rev. J. Kekela For His Noble Conduct in Rescuing An American Citizen from Death on the Island of Hiva Oa January 14, 1864."

To express his gratitude, Kekela wrote a seven-page letter of thanks in Hawaiian to "A. Linekona" on March 27, 1865. Accompanied by an English translation, the letter opened with a short autobiographical sketch of Kekela before transitioning into a retelling of how he saved "a citizen of your great nation, ill-treated, and about to be baked and eaten, as a pig is eaten." Kekela also commended Lincoln stating, "I greatly honor your interest in this countryman of yours. It is, indeed, in keeping with all I have known of your acts as president of the United States." Unfortunately, Lincoln never read Kekela's words. The letter did not reach Washington until almost two months after Lincoln's assassination.

However, the impact of Kekela's saving Whalon from "cannibals" and the gold watch Lincoln gave Kekela grew with time. In subsequent decades, newspapers reprinted and recounted Kekela's actions, the gold watch from Lincoln, and Kekela's letter to the president. The heartfelt prose in Kekela's letter to Lincoln moved many, including Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote in his book "In the South Seas," "I do not envy the man who can read it without emotion."

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